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THE EQUIVOCAL ASSUMPTION OF CORREGGIO

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Synopsis A study on the overlapping meanings in the central figure of the *Assumption of the Virgin* painted by Correggio in Parma Cathedral.

Keywords Antonio da Correggio; Cathedral of Parma; Christian iconography; Sandro Botticelli; Jorge Afonso; Caravaggio; Michelangelo; Cirilo Volkmar Machado.

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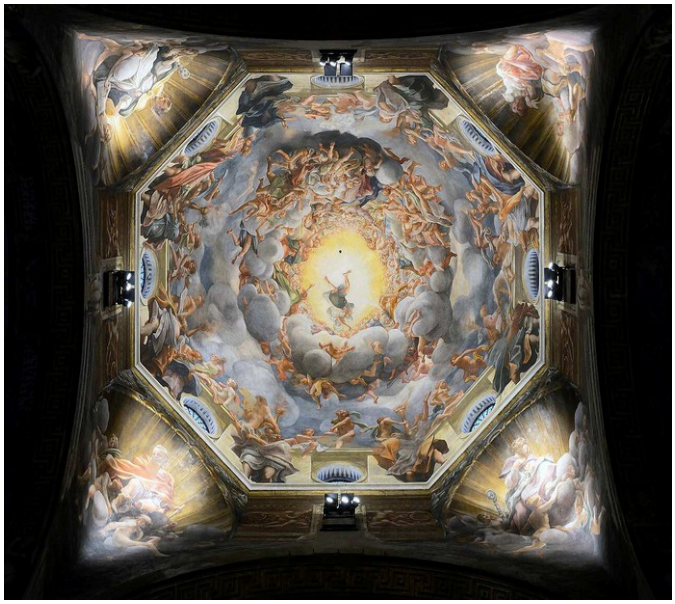


Corregio, *Assumption of the Virgin*, dome of the Cathedral of Parma [commons.wikimedia.org/Livioandronico2013].

In Parma Cathedral, Antonio da Correggio designed an Assumption of Mary that is as monumental as it is ambiguous, which is expressed in the elusive central figure.

Relatively common, these versatile devices followed a principle of ingenuity and economy, aiming to enrich the intellectual content of the works by inscribing associated narratives and corresponding complementary dynamics[1].

1 These artistic techniques are actually quite old, as can be seen in a Greek piece that is about 2,500 years old (see the video *The flawless eagle of Zeus* [archive.org | youtube.com]).

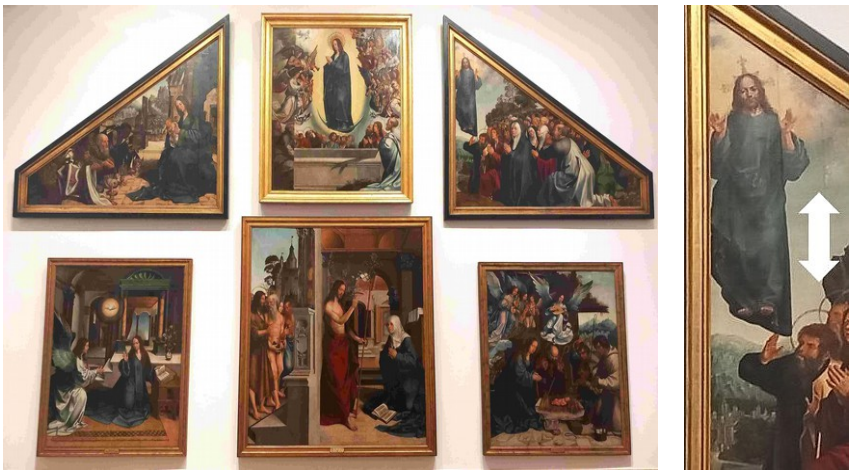
Comparative example (Botticelli)[2]

Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera*, Uffizi [commons.wikimedia.org/GoogleArtProject].

Layer 1: Chloris being kidnapped by Zephyr (who is intentionally atypical; a link to the second layer).

Layer 2: Hades/Pluto at the gates of his underworld, cyclically taking and releasing Persephone/Proserpina under the aegis of Demeter/Ceres at the center of the composition, thus allowing for an annual renewal of Spring/Primavera (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book V).

Comparative example (Jorge Afonso)[3]



Jorge Afonso, *Altarpiece of Madre de Deus/The Ascension of Jesus*, MNAA [PMO].
Layer 1: Ascension of Jesus.
Layer 2: Allusion to the promised second coming of Christ; and reaffirmation of the much-discussed transubstantiation (Eucharistic embodiment of the Messiah among the faithful), here adapting the skepticism of Thomas (Jn.20:26-29) ≈ the traditional representations of the Mass of St. Gregory, dealing with the same theme (e.g., by the so-called Master of the Legend of St. Catherine [commons.wikimedia.org]; as well as by Diego de la Cruz [commons.wikimedia.org/GoogleArtProject], etc.)

2 Regarding this particular artifice, see *Botticelli's Primavera: the dual wind*, 2013 [academia.edu], coll. in *Italian-crafted. Studies 2012-2016* [archive.org]; and "The Winter of Botticelli", in *Leonardo x Michelangelo*, 2013 [academia.edu | archive.org].

3 With essentially similar objectives, see another example in "O simbolismo da Charola de Tomar" – *Octógono* n.10, Dez.2024, p.15 [academia.edu | archive.org], coll. in *Segundo Octógono* (Nov-2024–Jun.2025) [academia.edu | archive.org].

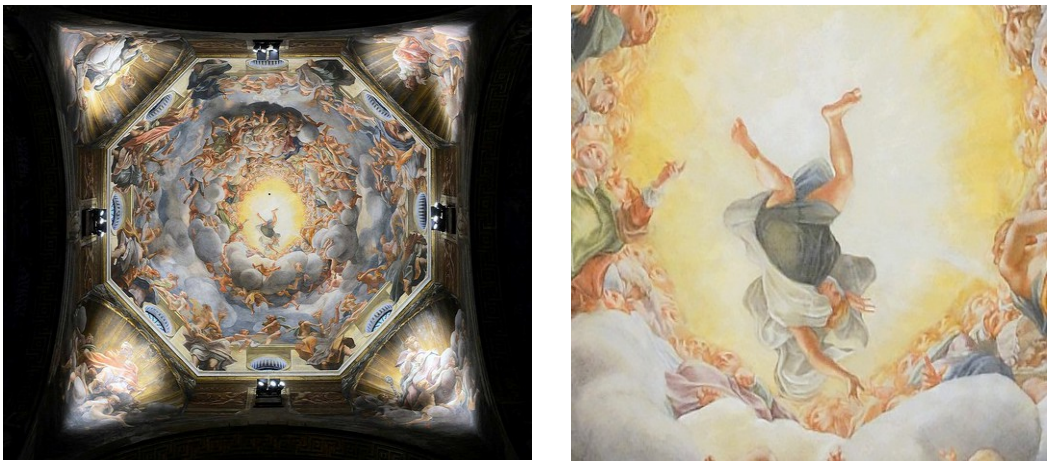
Comparative example (Caravaggio)[4]

Caravaggio, *Death of the Virgin*, Louvre [commons.wikimedia.org].
Layer 1: Death/Dormition of the Virgin.
Layer 2: Assumption of the Virgin (the character is actually suspended in the air, foreshadowing her imminent ascension to heaven).

Regarding Correggio's large painting under study here, its official layer does indeed depict the Assumption of Mary, who is wellcomed by a centered, beardless Jesus. But additionally the elevated distance is used to create an ambiguous descent to earth, evoking:

a) the transubstantiated embodiment of Christ to guide the faithful and foreshadow his second coming;

b) the expulsion and fall of the ambitious Lucifer, in the form of the Antichrist (i.e. from the root of original sin to the final victory over evil and redemption of Humanity; alpha→omega)[5].

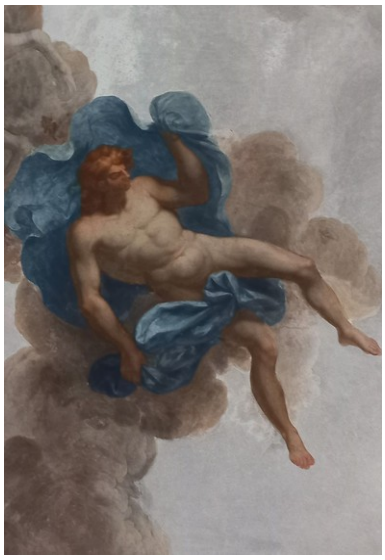


Corregio, *Assumption of the Virgin*, dome of the Cathedral of Parma [commons.wikimedia.org/Livioandronico2013].
Note that the dominant octagonal shape represents the connection between the earth (allegorized by the square with its four horizons) and the celestial and perpetual circle.

4 Regarding this specific device, see *The composite episodes in Christian Art*, 2014, p.6 [academia.edu]; regarding other ambiguities designed by Caravaggio, see the corresponding analyses in *Italian-crafted. Studies 2012-2016* [archive.org]; *Shared devices in European Art. Studies 2012-2015* [archive.org]; *Terceiro Octógono* (Jul.2025-Feb.2026) [academia.edu | archive.org]; as well as the video *Caravaggio's cliffhangers – the case of St. Matthew* [archive.org | commons.wikimedia.org | youtube.com].

5 In Correggio's great composition, the presence of other characters reinforce this logic (e.g. Adam and Eve).

Comparative examples (Michelangelo Buonarroti, Cirilo Volkmar Machado)



Michelangelo, *The Last Judgement*, det., Sistine Chapel [commons.wikimedia.org].
This Apollonian Jesus stands solid in the heavens (Christ as the "verum Apollinem", as Della Mirandola designated him in his convergent and syncretic *Oratio*).

Cirilo Volkmar Machado, *The Precipice of Phaeton*, det., Royal Building of Mafra [PMO].
This irresponsible and ambitious character suggests a negative version of his father Helios≈Apollo, thus symbolizing Lucifer/Antichrist.

In summary, Correggio's composition is yet another example of how important it was above all to synthesize the dynamics and coherence of the Christian faith as a whole.